1

Probably the first systematic search for gold in Georgia was conducted by Hernando DeSoto's Spaniards in 1540. There is no written record of the Spanish mines; but Spanish coins, a carved alabaster burial urn cover, and other articles of Spanish origin have been recovered from stream gravels, indicating that the Spaniards were active in the area. Lack of mining experience, inadequate tools, and hostile Indians probably discouraged them, limiting the amount of gold they recovered.

The Cherokee did no mining for gold. Some nuggets were found along the streams and used for ornaments, but gold was not actively sought.

By 1815 the white settlers had spread from the coast well into the Cherokee land, and in 1828 a large nugget, "yellow as the yolk of an egg," started one of America's earliest gold rushes. Word spread quickly, and within a few months miners could be found on nearly every stream in the area. The influx of gold seekers was so great that by 1830 there were between six and ten thousand persons. The seat of all this activity was the "town" of Auraria, in what is now Lumpkin County, with about 1000 inhabitants.

In addition to fighting among themselves, the miners frequently fought with the Indians over property rights. Despite both State and Federal troops, the miners continued to invade Indian lands. In some cases, miners would enter the Cherokee land after dark and gather bags of gold gravel to be paned safely on the Georgia side of the Chestatee River.

In spite of the hazardous working conditions, gold was taken from the ground in a steady flow. Some of the dust and nuggets were kept in the area for trade, but most was taken to the United States Mint at Philadelphia, a 700-mile journey along frontier trails.

Because of the hazards of taking gold to Philadelphia, a Georgian, Templeton Reid, established a private mint in Gainesville. Reid's coins did not have the backing of the government, but in 1842 the Philadelphia mint found them to be worth more than their face value. It is estimated that Reid coined an average of $700 daily, but it is not certain how long he continued to coin Georgia gold.

The State of Georgia took over the remaining Cherokee lands in 1830. This land eventually was divided into Cass (Bartow), Cherokee, Cobb, Floyd, Forsyth, Gilmer, Lumpkin, Murray, Paulding, and Union Counties. Seven hundred surveyors were enlisted to divide the land into 40-acre gold lots and 160-acre farms. The distinction between gold lot and farm was made mostly by guesswork; some 160-acre lots were found to be rich in gold while some 40-acre lots had none.

2

> *☞ I can hardly conceive of a more unmoral community than exists around these mines; drunkenness, gambling, fighting, lewdness, and every other vice exist here to an awful extent.*
>
> *Auraria Miner*
> *About 1830s*

When the survey was complete, the state held a lottery. Single men and widows were allowed one draw, married men two. Indians were excluded. The land was given free, with only an $18 filing fee required to secure the claim.

Shortly after the lottery, the county of Lumpkin was being organized, and a location was needed for a county seat. Auraria, the oldest and most prosperous settlement in the county, seemed a logical choice. However, on one of the lots in Auraria, no clear title could be established, so another county seat was chosen.

> *☞ I have never been amongst such a complete set of lawless beings. I do really believe that for a man to be thought honest here, would be a disadvantage to him, or at least he would be set down for a fool and treated accordingly.*
>
> *Auraria Miner*
> *About 1830s*

The county seat was established six miles from Auraria, in an unnamed settlement. The first Superior Court session voted to name the place "Talonega" from a Cherokee word meaning "yellow money." From Tau-Lau-ne-ka, the name became Tahlauneca, Talonega, Taulonica, Dahlonhnega, and finally, in 1833, Dahlonega.

3

As soon as titles to the land were established the trading began. One man visited the tract he had drawn and decided the lot was of no value. He traded it for one night's lodging and written promise to execute titles. Shortly thereafter, gold was discovered on the lot.

Some gold went to the Reid mint in Gainesville, but much gold was still being shipped to Philadelphia. Petitions had been circulated requesting a mint for Dahlonega, and in 1835 Congress appropriated $50,000 for construction of a mint "in or around Dahlonega." The mint opened in 1838, to make only gold coins, but before the opening of the Dahlonega mint, $1,763,900 of Georgia gold had reached the Philadelphia mint. There is no record of the amount coined by the Reid mint, or retained for local trade.

For the next 10 years, the gold miners settled into a relatively peaceful life. The quick strikes were over, so most of the speculators and grifters had moved away from the prospect of hard labor. Receipts for the first year of the mint's operation totaled $102,915; during its entire operation, 1838 to 1861, the receipts totaled $6,115,569.

In 1848 gold was discovered in California, but by the late 1850's, many miners returned to Georgia from California and Colorado, and they brought back the gold they had mined. The first Colorado dust ever to be coined came from the Dahlonega mint in 1859.

Dahlonega $3 gold coin—only 1120 minted.

When the Civil War began in 1861, the Dahlonega mint was closed and never reopened. Between 1838 and 1861 the mint had coined more than $6 million in denominations of $1, $2.50, $5, and, for one year, the rare $3.00 coin. A complete set of these coins is on display in the Administration Building of North Georgia College.

In 1871, the building was given to the State of Georgia, which accepted it for an agricultural college. That was the end of the mint, and the beginning of North Georgia College, for many years the only school of mining in the east.

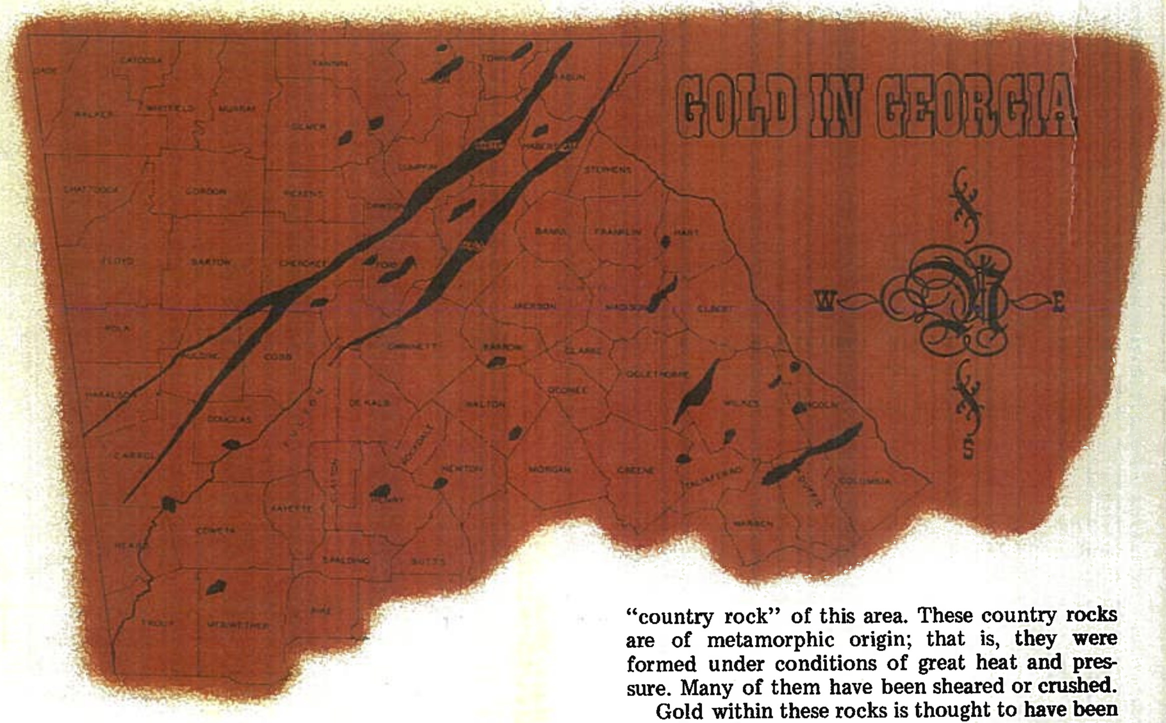
4

In 1878 the old building burned, and the citizens rebuilt on its foundations. Price Memorial Building, named for the founder of the college, now stands on that site. Its steeple is coated with 13½-ounces of gold taken from local mines.

> **Pigeon-Roost Store**
> **Witherow & Co.**
>
> *☞ Have just received an offer for sale at low prices, for Cash, an extensive assortment of*
>
> **E W Goods,**
>
> *Among which are the following.*
> *Ready-made Clothing,*
> *various qualities,*
> *Shoes Coarse and fine,*
> *Hats, Callicoes, Shirtings,*
> *Bombazettes, Blankets, Flannels,*
> *Shovel and Spades,*
> *Quicksilver, &c, &c.*
>
> *Being Agents for ALLENS & PADDOCK, of Augusta, they can Exchange at all times, U.S. Bank Bills, for Georgia and other Bills, and draw drafts at sight, on Augusta and elsewhere, on moderate terms.*
>
> *The Western Herald*
> *Auraria, Georgia*
> *November 16, 1833*

In the early 1870's Samuel J. Tilden, an unsuccessful presidential candidate, purchased a mine from Ulysses S. Grant, William Windom and others. At a reputed cost of $500,000, he extended a ditch 30 miles up into the mountains. Through this ditch a heavy stream of water was conducted to wash down saprolitic ores (those held in rotten rock). He is believed to have obtained $4 million worth of gold from 16 million tons of ore. Then he deeded the mine to his lawyer, S. L. M. Barlow. Barlow is reputed to have taken $3,000,000 from the mine before selling it to the Dahlonega Consolidated Gold Mining Company.

Between 1900 and 1906 the "Old Consolidated" operated what probably was the largest gold plant east of the Mississippi. The machinery and buildings represented an investment of $5 million. After six



years, the company had recovered only a few thousand dollars in gold, so the plant closed.

The most recent gold discovery of any importance occurred in 1939. The entrance to the old Calhoun mine was being enlarged for a tramway when a pocket of gold was uncovered less than two feet beneath the path that miners had tramped for a century. Major G. C. Dugas leased the mine and put a small crew of men to work. Dugas announced that the ore was worth up to $60,000 per ton and that there was "at least $40 million in sight." He organized a company and sold stock to anyone willing to invest. The true value of the lode never was revealed, but the project soon ended and many investors lost heavily.

In 1958 a wagon train from Dahlonega brought 46 ounces of gold to Atlanta to cover the capitol dome. This gold was a gift of the citizens of Dahlonega and Lumpkin County. Its soft yellow gleam is a reminder of the millions of dollars worth of gold already taken from the Georgia earth.

Georgia's gold deposits occur in narrow bands which run diagonally across the Piedmont region of the state. The gold is in quartz veins which are, in turn, enclosed by schists and gneisses, the "country rock" of this area. These country rocks are of metamorphic origin; that is, they were formed under conditions of great heat and pressure. Many of them have been sheared or crushed.

Gold within these rocks is thought to have been brought up by very hot waters from deep within the earth. This liquid was under pressure and forced its way into cracks and weaknesses in the country rock, then the water cooled as it neared the earth's surface and the gold settled into the spaces in the rock.

The dome of the State Capitol, Atlanta, covered with gold from Dahlonega.

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Earth & Water Division

TO:

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Three principal types of gold deposits are known in Georgia: vein deposits; gold-bearing saprolite, or rotten rock in place; and placer deposits.

Vein deposits are stringers or seams of quartz which contain gold surrounded by the hard country rock. To free the gold, the quartz first must be separated from the country rock; then the quartz is crushed in a stamp mill or other crusher. When the particles are fine enough, the gold can be separated from the quartz.

Gold in vein quartz.

Vein deposits are the most difficult and most expensive to mine. The size of veins and their gold content is irregular and unpredictable, although many miners believed that "the deeper it goes the richer it gets." In fact, however, there is only a 50-50 chance that this will be true.

Saprolite is "rotten rock" which has decomposed but still is in place. It may contain quartz veins, like the hard country rock, but the saprolite is much easier to mine.

The most popular way to mine saprolite deposits in Georgia was to "hydraulic a cut." A powerful stream of water was sprayed at a hillside and the loose earth, stones and gold were washed down by the force of the water. Fine sand and clay were washed through a sluice box, where the gold was caught by riffles. Quartz stones were hauled to a crusher or mill where they could be broken and the gold recovered.

This method of mining was relatively efficient in the gold belts of north Georgia, for the rock there has weathered very deeply. This gold could be recovered with much less labor than from harder, fresh rock.

Placer deposits are sand, gravel, decomposed rock, and gold which have washed down into stream valleys. Gold can be recovered by panning or by using a sluice box. Dredges sometimes are used to move great quantities of sand and gravel.

8

Placer and saprolite deposits probably accounted for 90 percent of the gold production in Georgia.

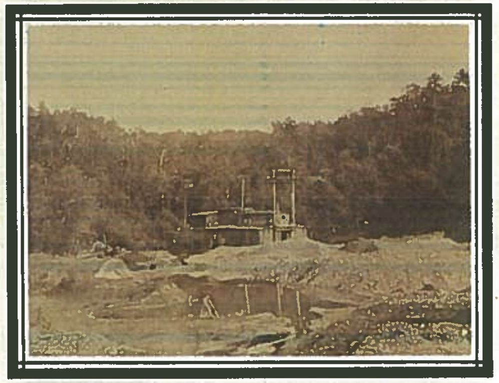
The soaring price of gold on today's market (nearly $200 per ounce) has stirred hopes of great fortunes to be found in the earth: "If there is gold there still, why not take it?"

One factor in gold production is the value of land. In 1832 the land was given away; but today most of the land is privately owned, so the owner must sell the land or release mineral rights. In fact, most land in mountainous areas of Georgia is worth more as resort and vacation sites than as a source of gold.

Crystalline gold, of the type found in the western United States.

9

A second important consideration is labor and equipment costs. The last gold mines were forced to close in the 1930's, the depression years, when labor was cheap. The price of gold now is about 6 times the depression price, but the cost of labor is about 20 to 60 times the cost of labor then. Modern machinery is available, but the cost of this machinery has increased at least as much as the cost of labor. Georgia's gold deposits are small, irregular and discontinuous; few are large enough to pay the cost of modern machinery purchases, much less return a profit.



Gold dredge on the Chestatee River south of Dahlonega. Note the piles of worked-over gravel clogging the stream.

One thing that early miners never considered was environmental damage. Hydraulic mining stripped away whole hillsides, streams were filled with silt and clay, forests were stripped away to provide lumber for buildings, flumes, mine supports. That would not be allowed today. State laws require that mine pits be reclaimed, cuts or banks must be seeded with grass to prevent soil erosion, mine tailings cannot be allowed to silt up streams. All these environmental safeguards add to production costs.

The combination of these three factors makes it doubtful that a new gold rush is starting in Georgia.

If you are interested in knowing more about Georgia's gold rush, you may obtain information from the Lumpkin County Chamber of Commerce, Dahlonega; the Dahlonega Courthouse Gold Museum, U.S. 19, Dahlonega, and from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Earth and Water Division, 19 Hunter Street, Atlanta 30334.

10

A Dahlonega miner panning for gold.

Samples of Georgia gold are on display in the State Museum, State Capitol, Atlanta; the Georgia Geological Survey, Room 400, 19 Hunter Street (Agriculture Building), Atlanta; Dahlonega Courthouse Gold Museum, and Blackburn State Park in Auraria. These last two museums also offer excellent displays of early mining tools and local history, as well as knowledgeable staffs to interpret the displays and explain mining methods.

Gold nugget from a Georgia placer deposit. The nugget weighs 5 ounces.

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Crystalline gold from Lumpkin County, Ga.

Even though panning for gold is not commercially profitable, it is an interesting hobby. The only equipment you need is a shovel, a pan, and a bottle to hold your dust. Pick out a warm day and a gravelly stream and you're ready.

To begin, shovel away the loose sand and gravel until you reach bedrock. This is where the gold collects, because it is so heavy. From the bottom layer of loose material, scoop up enough to cover the bottom of the pan. Add water until the pan is about half full, and swirl it around until all the pebbles in the pan are washed clean.

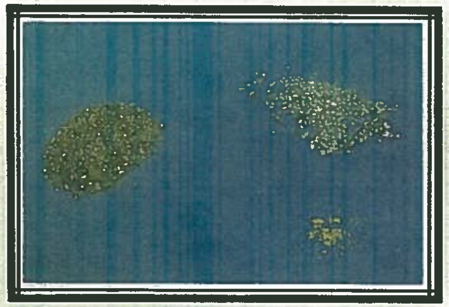
Hydraulic mining on Cane Creek near Dahlonega.

Now pick out and discard all the pebbles larger than a small pea. Begin swirling the pan with a gently motion, while tilting it away from you slightly. The light weight minerals in the pan should be picked up by the moving water, while the heavy minerals, including gold, should settle to the bottom. When you have some of the lighter material moving, tilt the pan a little more, until the light minerals are washed over the side, out of the pan. Continue swirling water and washing out light minerals until all the sand and mica are gone. Add more water as necessary. The gold will be in the heavy minerals at the bottom of the pan.

Brier Patch placer mine, Lumpkin County, about 1915.

A word of caution: All that glistens is not gold. Gold is soft and malleable, is very heavy, has a golden yellow color and gleams with a metallic luster. It is often confused with pyrite (fool's gold) and weathered mica.

Pyrite is heavy and yellow and has a metallic luster, but is very hard and brittle. It will break but it will not bend. Fool's gold sometimes occurs in cubes.



Clockwise from lower right: gold dust, weathered mica, and iron pyrite (fool's gold).

Mica occurs in flat flakes that may be very shiny and bronze-colored. It is very light, and should wash out of your gold pan very early in the process.

If you decide to try your luck at panning, visit Blackburn State Park on Ga. Hwy. 9E, near Auraria. Park personnel are on hand to give you instructions and encouragement. Or contact the Dahlonega Gold Museum for information.

Georgia Gold